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BABA IAGA AND THE RUSSIAN MOTHER

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For Russians and for foreigners familiar with Russian folklore, Baba Iaga is no doubt one of the most memorable and colorful figures found in the Russian folktale. One scholar rightfully calls her "one of the most interesting figures of Russian folklore" (Cherepanova 100). Even today, when the Russian oral tradition appears to be dying out, virtually all Russians are probably familiar with Baba Iaga through books and animated films. Although she occasionally appears in a number of different folklore genres (riddles, children's rhymes, *byliny*, seasonal songs) and has made forays into Russian "high" culture (such as Pushkin's poetry), Baba Iaga's true home is the folktale (*skazka*), and in particular, the type of folktale referred to as the "fairy tale" in English and the "magic tale" (*volshebnaia skazka*) in Russian.

Mentioning Baba Iaga's name brings to mind her typical attributes: her hut that turns on chicken legs ("izbushka na kur'ikh nozhkakh"), her mortar, pestle, and mop or broom ("v stupe edet, pestom pogoniaet, pomelom sled zametaet"), and her frequent epithet "bony leg" ("Baba Iaga kostianaia noga"). When inside her hut, she often lies on the stove, her body stretched from one corner of the hut to the other, with her nose sticking into the ceiling ("nos v potolok ros"). Some folk narrators emphasize the grotesqueness of her nose, breasts, buttocks, or vagina ("zhopa zhilena, manda mylena", Onchukov no. 8). Like some other folktale characters, Baba Iaga notices and comments on the "Russian scent" of her visitors ("Fu, fu, russkim dukhom pakhnet").

There are many variations on her name, such as Iagaia, Iga, Ega, Iagaba, Iagabova, Egibikha, Iagishna, Gigibikha, etc.[1] The name has been variously interpreted by linguists. Afanas'ev derived *iaga* from Sanskrit *ahi* ("serpent, snake"), and this etymology has been further explored by scholars who have attempted to show that Baba Iaga is derived from the snake (Laushkin; Cherepanova). Vasmer and Trubachev find this etymology unconvincing and suggest a connection with various Indo-European terms meaning "pain", "to torture", "worry", "doubt" and "sadness" (Trubachev

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vi: 68–69; Vasmer iii: 479). Recently, Shapiro (1983) has interpreted the *baba* component of the name to derive Baba Iaga from the pelican. The etymological evidence seems not firm enough to allow any conclusions about Iaga based on her name alone.

While her unusual appearance and name first attract our attention, Baba Iaga's ambiguity is equally striking. Most identifiable folktale characters in European traditions (possessing a consistent name and set of typical characteristics) behave in a predictable and unambiguous way toward the hero or heroine, exhibiting either kindness or hostility. In Vladimir Propp's terms, they are either villain or donor. But Baba Iaga is both villain and donor, and something else as well. At times she is a very hostile donor, and in fact it is sometimes difficult to distinguish clearly between these two aspects of her image. Propp finds that she is "a difficult character to analyze" and distinguishes three types of Baba Iaga: donor, abductor, and warrior (Propp 1946, 40–41). In his *Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp presents Baba Iaga as an example of a hostile or unwilling donor (Propp 1969, 73–74). Overall, Baba Iaga's image is more negative than positive. Novikov estimates that Baba Iaga is a villain in about two thirds of the tales in his sample (Novikov 175).

Baba Iaga's ambiguous nature emerges clearly in the traditional sequence of formulaic actions and phrases typical for tales in which she is a donor. Her first remarks to the hero or heroine who arrives at her hut often betray a cannibalistic intention, but she quickly backs down:

> He came and there stood a hut turning on a chicken's shin. "Well, hut, stand the old way, the way mother put you! With your back to the forest, your front toward me!" He went into this hut, took off his shoes and clothes, lay down on the oven and lay there the way he would at home. From nowhere came Iaga iagishna: she ran, and the forest rattled. She came into the hut and opened her mouth wide—she wanted to eat Vania, that Iaga iagishna. Vaniushka said: "What are you doing, you old bitch? Do old women in other villages do this? You should heat the bath, give me a steam bath and a bath and ask: where have you been living?" The old woman came to her senses: she heated the bath, gave him a steam bath and fed him. "Where have you been living?" (Zelenin 1914, no. 1)
>
> She walked, walked, and walked, wore out her boots, broke her twig, and swallowed the bread. She walked up to a hut, and the hut stood on chicken legs and turned around. "Hut, hut! Stand with your back to the forest, facing me." The hut turned. So she went into the hut, and there baba-iaga was turning around from one corner to the other: she was cleaning the floor with one lip, and closing up the chimney with her nose (she had a nose as big as the Perevitskii bridge!). "Fu, fu, fu" she said, "it used to be that the Russian scent was neither smelled with the scent nor seen with the sight, and now the Russian scent sits down in a spoon and rolls into my mouth. What are you doing, fair maiden, attempting a deed or flying from a deed?" (Khudiakov no. 39)

A different kind of ambiguity is displayed when different Baby Iagi in one tale act as donor and villain, respectively. In a tale from Perm' province (Zelenin 1914, no. 67), the second Iaga sister gives the heroine magic gifts to recover her falcon husband, while the third Iaga tries to prevent her

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from taking him and then pursues the couple. In a tale from Viatka province (Smirnov no. 130), the hero's wicked stepmother is a Iagibaba, but so is the third old woman donor who reunites the hero with his lost wife.

Occasionally, one and the same Baba Iaga takes on both roles. In another tale from Viatka province (Smirnov no. 141), Egiboba is both donor and villain, giving the hero magic gifts with which he defeats an enemy army, but turning his bride into a duck and forcing him to marry her own daughter.

This ambiguity is found not only in single narratives. In different versions of one and the same folktale (tale type)[2], Baba Iaga appears in some versions as a donor, in others as a villain.

Baba Iaga can be (and frequently has been) compared to similar figures from other folklore traditions, who in many instances play a role very similar to hers.[3] Closest to her are probably the Czech and Slovak Ježibaba (the name suggests a historical relationship), the Hungarian Iron-Nosed Witch (Vásorru bába), and the Finnish and Karelian Syöjätär. Ježibaba and The Iron-Nosed Witch share Baba Iaga's ambiguity, but lack her other attributes. Baba Iaga's combination of traits is unique.

This uniqueness has been noted by scholars and folklorists since the eighteenth century. In his 1782 "Dictionary of Russian Superstitions", Chulkov declares Baba Iaga to be an underworld goddess venerated by the ancient Slavs, who made blood sacrifices to her. Influenced by the ideas of the "solar mythology" school and Max Müller, Afanas'ev and Potebnia interpreted Baba Iaga as the personification of the storm cloud (Afanas'ev 1869, 587–588; Potebnia 197). More recently, Gasparini has interpreted Baba Iaga as a lunar witch, and relates features such as her turning hut to the cycles of the moon.

Probably the most influential scholarly speculation concerning Baba Iaga is that of Vladimir Propp. His 1946 work on the roots of the magic tale was quite a departure from the method of synchronic analysis he had applied in his *Morphology*. Having discovered that all Russian magic tales have the same underlying pattern, Propp wished to explain how this structure came about. He saw the source in "archaic" rituals of initiation, practiced in societies of Africa, Oceania and the Americas. According to Propp, the ritual, in which initiates underwent symbolic death and rebirth, corresponds to the hero(ine)'s journey to the other world of the folktale (Propp 1946, 79).

There are several methodological problems with Propp's theory. An assumption is made that all human societies evolve in the same manner, through a series of stages. Propp's term is *stadial'nost'*, a concept which recalls the anthropological school's scheme of human societal development from savagery to barbarism to civilization, and which no doubt reflects the influence of Morgan and Engels (Propp 1984, 161–172). Even if there is no

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direct evidence that the ancient Slavs, ancestors of the Russian peasants from whom the folktales were recorded, ever had an initiation ritual similar to those described by Propp, it is implied that they did. Propp introduces examples of initiation rituals from many different societies, which must also differ widely among themselves: introducing those features of initiation rituals which bear resemblance to folktale motifs and ignoring those which do not, his conception of this ritual seems a rather arbitrary construct. Another difficulty is that Propp never explains exactly how ritual becomes folktale, or how and why the structure of the ritual arose in the first place.

Propp considers Baba Iaga the classical form of the donor figure, while recognizing that her image is complex and contradictory. Baba Iaga's association with the forest is significant. The forest is both the place of initiation and the entrance to the land of the dead, since initiates experience a symbolic death (Propp 1946, 44–45). Baba Iaga is the guardian who lives at the gateway to the land of the dead. Her hut faces toward the land of the dead and therefore the hero(ine) must make the hut turn with a magic formula; he or she cannot simply walk around to the other side. Sometimes initiation took the symbolic form of being swallowed by an animal, and the initiation hut originally represented an animal. In the folktale, only one part of the hut (the chicken legs) has retained its zoomorphic nature (46–51). The "Russian scent" of the hero that Baba Iaga notices is the smell of the living, which is frightening and offensive to the dead. Propp demonstrates this through a number of Native North American and African folktales (51–53).

Propp explains many other of Baba Iaga's typical attributes through her association with initiation and with the dead: the food and drink she gives the protagonist, her cramped position inside the hut (which recalls a corpse inside a coffin), her bony leg, the tasks that Baba Iaga sometimes sets for the hero(ine), as well as what he presumes to be her blindness (53–61, 65–68).

Propp considers Baba Iaga a mother of animals, a mistress of beasts who can be traced back to a female totemic ancestor. Propp sees a line of development from totem animal to zoomorphic woman to goddesses such as Cybele and Artemis (61–65).

Finally, Propp raises a fundamental question about Baba Iaga's role as initiator. Why is it that young men are initiated by a female figure? In some Russian folktales, Iaga is a relative of the hero's wife or mother, but never of the hero himself or his father. Although Iaga's relationships to the hero's wife or mother are expressed in conventional kinship terms (mother-in-law, aunt, sister), her true relationship is that of belonging to the same totemic clan as the hero's wife or mother. "All these materials explain the forms of the hero's kinship with Iaga, but they do not yet completely explain why Iaga is a woman. However, they show that the explanation must be sought in the matriarchal relations of the past" (93).

Baba Iaga's associations with initiation (an echo of which is found in

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folktales when she abducts children, or presents magic objects to the hero) and with death (exhibited by many of her attributes and actions) explain her ambiguous nature in Russian folktales. As the initiation ritual died out, only Baba Iaga's association with death was remembered. With the appearance of agriculture, a new religion replaced the older hunting beliefs, and the old divinities were reinterpreted as evil spirits. Iaga, the mother and mistress of the beasts, became a witch (96).

In spite of its weaknesses, Propp's interpretation of Baba Iaga has been very influential in subsequent scholarship, inspiring much commentary, criticism, and revision (Meletinskii 198–199; Novikov 177–179; Becker; Kravchenko 184–204; Hubbs 36–51). In particular, the view that Baba Iaga originated during a matriarchal period, and that her "wicked" aspect is a later development, brought about by the rise of patriarchy, has become a commonplace (Ivanov and Toporov 176; Novikov 180).

An important objection to interpretations based on past customs or beliefs is that during the time the folktales about Baba Iaga were recorded, they were surely to a large extent creations of fantasy; little or nothing of them necessarily reflects the reality of earlier historical periods. Baba Iaga is documented in East Slavic folklore since the eighteenth century, and it seems reasonable to assume that she is considerably older. She might possibly derive from Slavic pre-Christian religious beliefs and practices, and for some folktale tellers and listeners, Baba Iaga was akin to evil spirits and witches, in whose existence the East Slavs believed. Certainly Baba Iaga has an origin and a history, but given the lack of solid evidence, these must remain a matter of speculation.

On the other hand, what we do know for certain about Baba Iaga is her appearance as a character in recorded folktales, and our search for her meaning(s) should begin there. We know that the tales about Baba Iaga were in circulation for at least two hundred years, and during this documented period the image of Baba Iaga remains remarkably stable, which speaks for the conservatism of the Russian folklore tradition and the culture which produced it. Based on this folkloric record, we can ask what Baba Iaga meant for the very people who told and listened to tales about her.

Felix Oinas and Natalie Moyle have pointed out that the figures of Russian folk belief (the various house and nature spirits) are projections of the traditional Russian way of life (Oinas 87; Moyle 235–236). It seems reasonable to assume that the East Slavs have also projected some aspects of their traditional life onto the popular figure of Baba Iaga, for if she did not have mass appeal, it is unlikely that she would have maintained her prominent place in this folklore tradition through the twentieth century. When Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians tell, listen to, and enjoy stories about Baba Iaga, they are also telling us something about themselves.

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The desire to understand Baba Iaga's meaning for her audiences has inspired a number of studies which examine Baba Iaga in psychological terms. Although their approaches vary, scholars who have tried to interpret Baba Iaga in this light agree that she is a mother figure. An early study of Russian psychology suggests that Baba Iaga and other folklore figures might have their roots in childhood experience (Gorer). For the Jungians, such as Marie-Louise von Franz, Baba Iaga is a representation of the Great Mother archetype: "she is not thoroughly evil, and sometimes even helpful; she wonderfully portrays the Great Mother in her double aspect" (Franz 172). For Freudian scholars (such as Olga Periañez-Chaverneff), Baba Iaga reflects the individual's own infantile experience of the mother. If, in fact, Baba Iaga does reflect some aspect of the mother-child relationship in traditional Russian culture, we can compare the "evidence" of the folktale with what we know of child rearing patterns in the culture that produced the tales. Baba Iaga's identification as a mother figure would also explain her enduring popularity in the East Slavic folktale tradition.

In a number of folktales, Baba Iaga's behavior suggests that she is a mother figure: when she appears as a wicked stepmother in several Russian versions of AT 480[4], when she captures the hero by imitating his mother's voice in SUS 327F[5], when she disguises herself as the hero's mother in Karnaukhova no. 141, when she works as a midwife in Zelenin 1915 no. 27, and when the hero or heroine addresses her as "mother" (Zelenin 1915 no. 115; Smirnov no. 143; Afanas'ev 1984–85 no. 107). In Balashov no. 134, Iaga-baba causes Prince Ivan's young wife to be driven away. Then Iaga-baba disappears from the tale. At the end, when justice has been restored and the prince reunited with his wife, his mother suddenly dies. The narrator did not seem to know why herself, but this outcome certainly suggests that Iaga-baba is an alter ego for Prince Ivan's mother.

Many scholars have noted Baba Iaga's ambiguity, but few have considered how this ambiguity and how her various traits are distributed in actual folktale texts. When we begin to gather texts in which Baba Iaga appears, we are confronted with a bewildering variety of tales. Periañez-Chaverneff's study suggests that different types of protagonists encounter different types of Baba Iaga. Specifically, the age and gender of the protagonist bear some relation to Baba Iaga's benevolence or hostility.

We might begin by examining Baba Iaga's role in "children's" tales, i. e., tales in which the hero or heroine is a child. In fact it is in these tales where Baba Iaga plays a particularly important role. While the tales themselves rarely give their protagonist an age, it is possible to isolate those tales including Baba Iaga which lack a final wedding (Propp's thirty-first function). The protagonists of these tales are more likely to be children or young unmarried men and women.

Baba Iaga is overwhelmingly a negative figure in the children's tales.

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Baba Iaga is a villain in every tale with a boy hero. The most popular of these tales appears to be SUS 327C-F, where Baba Iaga kidnaps a boy and tries to cook him.[6] She often succeeds in kidnapping the hero by imitating his mother's voice. At her hut she instructs her daughters to cook the boy, but he pretends not to know how to sit on the bread spatula correctly. The foolish daughters demonstrate how, and the boy shoves them in. Sometimes Baba Iaga is fooled herself in this way, and at other times the boy simply escapes by running away or being carried home by birds. The tale presents a good mother (the boy's mother) and a bad mother (Baba Iaga), plays out the dangers of maternal seduction, and allows listeners to vent hostile feelings toward the mother by laughing at Baba Iaga when she is cooked. The traditional East Slavic ritual "baking" of children, which involved putting sickly children into the oven for short periods of time, while it may bear no historical relationship to the folktale, does suggest that the oven can function as a symbol of the womb (Toporkov). The oven is identified as a mother in Russian riddles and proverbs, and Zelenin describes the custom of opening the oven door to open the womb and ease childbirth (Sadovnikov 1959, 43; Dal' 589; Zelenin 1991, 320).

The fact that the tale usually ends with the boy's return suggests that the conflicts in his relationship with his mother are resolved in the fantastic episode and so allow for a return to a harmonious situation. What appears to occur in this folktale is a splitting of the mother image into a good mother (the boy's mother at the beginning and end) and a bad mother (Baba Iaga).

The concept of splitting maternal and paternal images in folklore has been discussed by a number of scholars. Rank identifies two related processes, splitting and doubling. Splitting reflects the positive and negative emotions aroused by the parent figure, and allows legendary heroes to rebel against a tyrannical father, while exhibiting the culturally expected filial piety toward a good father. Doubling of mother, daughter or sister figures allows incestuous desires to be realized safely (Rank 15–16). According to Bettelheim, the practice of splitting parent figures, separating their benign and threatening aspects, allows children to maintain a pure image of the benevolent parent. Hence the abundance of wicked stepparents in folktales (Bettelheim 66–68). Similarly, Spiro explains that before the cognitive developmental stage of "object constancy", it is impossible for a child to integrate conflicting images and fantasies of a person into a single mental representation. This leads to a splitting into "good" and "bad" parental representations (Spiro 113).

In children's tale types with a girl heroine, Baba Iaga is also never purely a donor, and most frequently a villain. But in one tale type, and the most popular (AT 480), she is ambiguous. This tale contrasts the behavior and reward of the kind heroine with the punishment meted out to her step-

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mother's unkind daughter. The girls are sent out to the forest or some other remote place, where a supernatural figure rewards and punishes them. In different Russian versions of the tale, Baba Iaga is sometimes the wicked stepmother, and sometimes the figure encountered in the forest, who may be hostile or kind.[7] Thus the good mother/bad mother split appears more complex for the girl.

Baba Iaga's different behavior toward girl and boy protagonists suggests that for the girl, the creation of an entirely negative mother figure is not as possible as for the boy, whose gender differs from his mother's and raises different issues. This is also borne out by the fact that, although Baba Iaga expresses the same cannibalistic intentions toward girls and boys (and does eat girls, including her own daughters in SUS 327C-F), she rarely tries to cook a girl in her oven. For the East Slavic folktale tradition, the oven episode with Baba Iaga is an adventure appropriate for boys but not for girls. This may imply that Baba Iaga's oven/womb (and its threat of reincorporation into the mother's body) does not represent as great a danger for the girl heroine as for the boy hero, or that the formation of an independent female identity does not require the violent rupture of the oven episode. Examining the different nature of mother-daughter and mother-son relationships, Nancy Chodorow suggests that the girl has a longer preoedipal period, a longer period of symbiosis with the mother, and is more likely to feel her identity as being continuous with her mother (Chodorow 92–110). This may explain the more differentiated image of Baba Iaga in female children's tales, as opposed to the purely evil Baba Iaga encountered by boy heroes.

When we examine the "adult" tales, the picture of Baba Iaga's hostility, benevolence, and ambiguity changes. Here, Baba Iaga's role is not as significant; she appears in shorter episodes. There are a number of male-centered tale types (SUS 550, 551) where Baba Iaga is exclusively a donor. In these tales, the hero resolves difficult tasks, combats enemies, and acquires a bride. Baba Iaga's role is generally more modest, sending the hero on his way. However, in the tale about the hero's search for the apples of youth or healing water (SUS 551), the hero confronts the threatening and warlike Tsar Maiden, and Baba Iaga appears as the only non-threatening female figure. She appears to mediate a man's anxiety about his sexual and gender role, as she mediates between the Tsar Maiden and the hero (she keeps the Tsar Maiden from capturing him, she is the Tsar Maiden's aunt).

In her negative stance as a villain in male-centered adult tales, Baba Iaga decapitates, gouges out eyes, and turns men to stone. In Freudian terms, all these actions threaten male identity, and can be seen as symbolic castration, or at least control of the man's sexuality.

When Baba Iaga is a donor in female-centered tales with adult heroines, she usually helps the heroine in her search for a lost spouse. There are no

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female-centered adult tale types where Baba Iaga is exclusively a donor, however. As a villain in the female-centered tales, Baba Iaga most often is a usurper, ousting the heroine and putting herself or her daughter in the heroine's place. While this could be interpreted in oedipal terms, with the mother as the daughter's rival for the father's affection, the circumstances of Russian peasant culture suggest that these tales refer to a later stage in a woman's life. Baba Iaga's villainy might express the woman's postmarital experience in her husband's household, where her claim on her husband's affections (if in fact affection existed at all between husband and wife) might be strained by the presence of his mother, sisters and other female relatives. The tales in which Baba Iaga causes the heroine to be driven away also concern lack or loss of an affective bond between a woman and her husband or brother.

Besides the different pattern of benevolence, hostility and ambiguity that emerges in male and female tales, what of Baba Iaga's various attributes? If certain of her attributes are distributed differently in tales with male heroes than in those with female heroines, then we might expect these attributes to have unconscious sexual meaning. In fact, there is a qualitative difference in this distribution. The largely formulaic donor sequence (arrival at the hut, spoken formulas to make the hut turn, to enter, Baba Iaga's threatening greeting, the protagonist's rebuke) is found in male adult tales, in female adult tales, and in female children's tales. It is largely absent in male children's tales. This suggests that the hut on chicken legs and the associated formulas do have an unconscious sexual meaning, or at least that they have different meanings for female and male protagonists.

Besides being grotesque, Géza Róheim finds that many of Baba Iaga's traditional attributes are phallic, and that she is also a phallic mother (Róheim 1947, 73). Most obviously, Baba Iaga wields a pestle and broom (or mop) when she travels and has a bony leg (or a leg made of some other unusual material), and a large nose (sometimes an iron nose, like her Hungarian counterpart). Occasionally Baba Iaga may sport a giant iron tooth (Dobrovol'skii no. 13) or an iron hook (Karnaukhova no. 74), or speak in a deep, bass voice (Zelenin 1915, no. 14). She may attack the hero with snakes (Karnaukhova no. 141), or command an entire army (Afanas'ev 1984–95, no. 161). In addition, her name has given rise to a rare instance of a matronymic in Russian culture. Baba Iaga's daughters are called *iagishny*, and her son is sometimes called *Agich* or *Iagich*, "son of Iaga" (Sadovnikov 1884, no. 16; Balashov no. 57).

Some psychologists have interpreted fantasies about phallic women as an expression of male castration anxiety. As frightening as the fantasies of phallic women may be themselves, they serve to deny women's genital difference and the more frightening possibility that a man might lose his penis. Freud states that the snakes which form Medusa's hair "are derived

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from the castration complex. It is a remarkable fact that, however frightening they may be in themselves, they nevertheless serve actually as a mitigation of the horror, for they replace the penis, the absence of which is the cause of the horror" (Freud xviii: 273; see also Chodorow 107; Rancour-Laferriere 185–191; Spiro 118). Fantasies about phallic women are especially significant for men who have an insufficient sense of self separate from the mother (Chodorow 107, citing Greenacre). Thus in a culture where male children are exclusively taken care of by women (like Russia), we might expect the development of phallic woman fantasies.

Consciously, there is no doubt that the phallic, hostile Baba Iaga is an object for negative emotions, but unconsciously, the phallic attributes of Baba Iaga might ease anxieties about male identity for male listeners. Phallic features might also make Baba Iaga into something of a cautionary figure, a negative example of what a woman should not be (dominant, aggressive, assertive, masculine). Not surprisingly, the phallic features of Baba Iaga are most prominent in male-centered tales. Her grotesque features may also serve to make her sexually unappealing and therefore nonthreatening to men or women.

The anxiety about unsuccessful separation from the mother has been termed "symbiosis anxiety" by some psychologists. Both male and female infants develop their first sense of identity in a state of being merged with their mother, a protofemininity. Symbiosis anxiety is significant for the male child, who must develop a core gender identity different from his mother's. Male symbiosis anxiety is expressed in defensive negative attitudes about femininity and women (Stoller 181–183). The many Russian versions of SUS 327C-F (where Baba Iaga tries to cook a boy) broadly hint at the danger a mother presents if she is too attached to a male child. Whether or not mothers really present a danger for their male children is difficult to say, but the presence of this tale and its popularity in the Russian folk repertoire suggest a cultural symbiosis anxiety at work.

Baba Iaga's relation to the hero and heroine suggests a concern with separation and individuation issues, which have their roots in the infant's first symbiosis with its mother. This may be the reason for the persistence of oral aggression and the concern with food in Baba Iaga's image (her threat to eat the protagonist even in the donor sequence, her identification in a riddle as a plough that feeds the world but goes hungry herself).[8] It seems possible that her function, compared to the more benevolent mother images produced by Russian culture, is to express anxieties and tensions which have their roots in this early period, and which concern separation and the establishment of ego boundaries between the self and the mother. The hostility felt toward the mother and her embodiment in Baba Iaga is perhaps more significant for the male child, since masculine identity is more difficult to arrive at, and therefore surrounded by greater insecurity.

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The Russian girl was surrounded by other girls and women who provided her with models for learning her gender role, since girls and women were the primary caretakers of infants and small children. But presumably, male gender models were not as easily available for boys.[9] The recollection of the overwhelming maternal presence in childhood could account for hostility to the mother image later, and for men, hostility to women in general. This might partially account for the grotesque and denigrating descriptions of Baba Iaga's body, and the harsh rebuke and demand for hospitality that the folktale protagonist sometimes expresses. Another good reason for hostility toward Baba Iaga is that she was used to frighten children, who were told that she might seize them (Efimenko 166). It is not surprising to find that Baba Iaga is ridiculed in children's rhymes (Loiter 92–94, 127).

The folktales we have been considering all concern a hero or heroine who encounters Baba Iaga. Baba Iaga is never the protagonist or central character of the tale. She is always an "Other", as demonstrated by the usual location of her dwelling (in the forest on the way to another realm, in the underground realm) and her remark about the hero or heroine's Russian scent. Perhaps this "foreignness" is also what has inspired some scholars to search for her origin outside the East Slavic area. Zelenin believed that tale tellers of Perm' and Viatka provinces tended to identify fantastic figures such as Baba Iaga and the Frog Tsarevna with the neighboring Finno-Ugric and other non-Slavic peoples (Zelenin 1914, xxiii). However, Baba Iaga's image and essential features are relatively stable throughout Russia, in areas with and without nearby non-Slavic populations.

Psychologically speaking, this construction of Baba Iaga as an Other might represent an effort to create or emphasize a boundary between the self (the hero or heroine of the tale) and the figure represented by Baba Iaga. Baba Iaga's "non-Russian" and grotesque characteristics may in fact allow the Russians to vent negative emotions safely on a fantastic figure who will not consciously be recognized as the mother. At the same time, this "foreignness" is another way of emphasizing the ego boundary, of stating emphatically that the mother is separate and different from the self, and so mitigating anxiety surrounding separation issues.

Classical psychoanalytic thought has placed great emphasis on the mother-child dyad and its relation to the Oedipus complex. While this emphasis on an exclusive relationship of two individuals reflects the child's situation in the nuclear family of modern western Europe and North America, such exclusivity was probably not typical for most Russian peasant and rural children. The structure of the family in rural Russia varied, from small, nuclear families of married couples with children to the large joint family consisting of several related couples under the rule of a family patriarch. In this situation it is likely that many infants and young children had caretakers other than their biological mother (grandmothers, aunts,

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cousins, sisters). This phenomenon of multiple mothering, or a diffusion of maternal responsibilities, has been observed in Russia quite recently, with persons other than the child's natural mother, even complete strangers, taking on a mothering role (Bronfenbrenner 10–11). Etkind has recently pointed out the importance of nannies and grandmothers for the Russian child's development (Etkind 112–114).

If Baba Iaga is a mother figure, in fact she represents the perception not of one individual biological mother but of a number of people, of anyone who might have mothered the child. Also, she probably represents not so much individual mothers as a certain style of mothering typical for Russian culture. This might account for some aspects of her name and imagery. Because the Russian language lacks articles, it is difficult to determine when or if the occurrences of Baba Iaga's name are proper or generic, and whether they should be rendered as "Baba Iaga", "a Baba Iaga", or "the Baba Iaga." This uncertainty about whether to regard her as an individual or a type is revealed in the published Russian folktales, where the name is printed sometimes with a capital, and sometimes a lower-case letter.

Another aspect of Baba Iaga's imagery which deserves attention in this context is her frequent appearance as a donor in trebled form, as three sisters. In these tales the hero or heroine progresses usually from the youngest to the oldest Baba Iaga. The trebling of Baba Iaga is by itself hardly surprising or unusual, since threefold repetition is a common device in Indo-European folklore (Thompson 456). Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that this splitting into three almost identical figures never occurs with the anthropomorphic male ogre Koshchei, while it does happen to Baba Iaga. Perhaps the individuality of Koshchei and the multiplicity of Baba Iaga is an echo of the Russian rural patriarchal joint family, with its single all-powerful and sometimes tyrannical male head, and its multiple mothers.

Of course there are many mother representations in East Slavic culture besides Baba Iaga. The earth is identified in folklore by the epithet "mother moist earth" ("mat' syra zemlia"), Russia is called a mother ("Matushka Rus' "), as is the Volga river ("Volga matushka"). The cult of Mary has an important place in the Orthodox Church, which refers to her most often as the "Mother of God" ("Bogoroditsa, Bogomater' ") (Hubbs). The importance of mothers in Russian culture is also expressed in the idealized portraits of mothers in Russian autobiography and pseudoautobiography (Wachtel). Tolstoy contributed significantly to this tendency in his *Childhood*, and in *War and Peace* the importance of mothers is expressed by Platon Karataev.

The multiplicity of positive mother representations in Russian folklore and literature suggests that the early mother-infant bond is strong and that the desire to reproduce it may resurface in adult life in other forms. How-

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ever, in a culture where the child's primary and most intense relationship is with the mother or mothering figure(s), it seems inevitable that this relationship will exhibit ambivalence. Baba Iaga is close to the negative end of the spectrum of maternal images, which suggests that she is a focus for negative emotions experienced toward the mother(s) in Russian culture.

It appears that the folkloric image of Baba Iaga is one way in which traditional Russian culture mediates the mother-child relationship. It seems not unlikely that her unusual character profile, expressed especially clearly in the children's tales, derives from child rearing in traditional Russian culture, and specifically from the qualitatively different mother-son and mother-daughter relationships. There is no easy explanation for Baba Iaga's ambiguous nature, which may be a result of multiple mothering, or may suggest that the Russian child's relationship with his or her mother was tinged with a high degree of ambivalence.

If we identify as typical and significant features her oral aggression (or an emphasis on food, whether in a benevolent or hostile context) and her phallic features in male-centered tales, then these features suggest that separation issues are significant in determining Baba Iaga's image. Although Baba Iaga is overwhelmingly a villain in East Slavic folktales and functions as a focus for a variety of negative emotions felt toward the maternal image, her ambiguity shows that she cannot be constructed entirely as an evil Other. This suggests that issues of separation from the mother and individuation are important in the fantasy life of the East Slavic folktale tellers and listeners, probably more so than in traditions which lack such an ambiguous figure.

NOTES

1 For a more complete list, see Novikov 133, and Cherepanova 104–105.

2 In the following, the internationally adopted system of tale types will be used. Tales are referenced as found in the Aarne-Thompson index (AT) and the 1979 *Sravnitel'nyi ukazatel' siuzhetov* (SUS) (Barag et al.).

3 Baba Iaga is well represented in Belorussian folktales, but appears to be less popular in Ukraine.

4 For examples, see Simina nos. 21 and 22, Zelenin 1914 no. 77, Lutovinova no. 29, and Smirnov no. 42.

5 See Zelenin 1915 no. 115, Potiavin nos. 9 and 10, Kretov no. 18, Bakhtin and Shiriaeva no. 54, Smirnov nos. 40 and 120, and Afanas'ev 1984–85 no. 111.

6 A few examples are Afanas'ev 1984–85 nos. 106 and 107, Smirnov nos. 143, 231 and 250, and Zelenin 1915 nos. 87, 97, and 115.

7 AT 480 is often called "Stepmother and Stepdaughter" is Russia. See Lutovinova for Russian versions of this tale.

8 "Baba Iaga / Vilami noga / Ves' mir kormit— / Sama golodna" (Sadovnikov 1959, 140).

9 A recent study of gender role socialization in contemporary Russia suggests that this remains true today (Kerig et al.).

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